



# A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF INDIA

FROM 1858 TO 1918

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*WITH MAPS*

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## PREFACE

THE student and the general reader alike still greatly need a volume which provides them with a brief but connected narrative of modern Indian history ; a knowledge of the past is an essential to an understanding of the present ; and so the purpose of this volume is to explain how the India of our fathers has been transformed into the India of our own day, to sketch the causes which have produced this remarkable change, and to outline the manner of their operation. It is not an easy task. In so complicated a story much must be left untold ; amid a multiplicity of causes some must be omitted, some may be mistaken ; above all the principal figures of recent events are still distorted by the passion of conflict and obscured by the dust of controversy. But in spite of these disadvantages, I hope that an attempt to tell the story dispassionately may not lack its uses, if only to point the moral that although men may commit crimes, they are much more likely to commit blunders.

The greater part of the material on which the present work is based consists of printed matter—the correspondence of the leading actors, the official correspondence and other documents of the Parliamentary Papers and official reports, and the documents issued by the Government of India, together with the chief books dealing with various

parts of my subject. At the end of this book I append a select bibliography, intended rather to guide the reader in further studies than to indicate my own innumerable obligations.

I must particularly acknowledge the kindness of Mr. John Buchan in allowing me to read the draft chapters relating to India in his *Lord Minto*, and of Lady Minto in allowing me to read in its entirety the demi-official correspondence exchanged between Lord Morley and Lord Minto during the latter's viceroyalty. These letters, part of which were printed by Lord Morley in his *Recollections*, give a very different impression as a whole from that suggested by the printed selection.

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## INTRODUCTION

IN 1858 no one would have denied that India was held by the sword ; in 1918 this had ceased to be true. In 1858 the Company's covenanted servants constituted in effect the Government of India ; in 1918 appeared a scheme to transfer the Government to popularly chosen hands. In 1858 the control of the Home Government was confirmed and emphasized by the creation of a Secretary of State for India ; in 1918 Secretary of State and Governor-General signed the report envisaging the immediate relaxation and the ultimate extinction of that control. These contrasts may serve as a rough measure of the changes that have transformed the Indian problem in the last two generations.

We must not, however, exaggerate the magnitude of these changes. They loom large because they are near to us in point of time. But rightly considered they are the continuation and development of momentous and rapid changes in the period that preceded the Mutiny. In 1858 there were many men still living who remembered the Presidency of Bengal as consisting merely of that province and Behar, the Presidency of Madras as a few strips of territory lying along the Coromandel Coast, and the Presidency of Bombay as some small islands and a little land in Guzerat ; men who remembered the days when it was customary to withhold the

revenue until it was collected by force ; who had weighed the chances of Sikh or Maratha in a war against the Company ; who had seen French officers commanding the troops of Sindia and Nizam 'Ali ; and who had been the first pupils in the first schools subsidized by the funds of Government. The changes within living memory in 1858 were at least as remarkable as those which we can remember to-day.

Further, the period which led up to the Mutiny resembles in general outline the period which led up to Mr. Gandhi's Non-Co-operation Movement. The parallel is not exact, because, when history repeats itself, it does so with variations. The principal interests in the earlier period are those of the Company's territorial expansion and the restoration of administrative order ; whereas the principal interests of our own age have been those of educational progress and political development. But in both periods the British Government urged forward the spread of Western influences, Western ideas and Western culture ; and in both periods this provoked a great reaction, in which the leaders employed Western machinery to overthrow Western predominance. The unsuccessful appeal of the leaders of the Mutiny to the sword, the unsuccessful appeal of the leader of Non-Co-operation to moral influences, constitute an interesting variation in the pattern.

There was, moreover, one great factor that only began to count for much in the latter period. The dominant fact in the history of the last two generations has been the shrinkage of the world. The

development of transport and communications, the steamship and the railway, the telegraph and the daily press, have transformed man's relations with his fellows, and profoundly changed the nature of governments and the quality of their interaction. The different parts of the earth have become interdependent in a new and much more intimate sense. London and Shanghai are to-day nearer together than were London and St. Petersburg a century ago. The operations alike of trade and war have become world-wide. And though war and crime have not been banished, though the old sanctions of public and private morals have in some respects been weakened, our human outlook has undoubtedly broadened, and the new conditions have made possible a sense of human unity which of old was inconceivable. Men are not becoming perfect, but they are most assuredly being changed.

The transformation has been great in Europe ; but it has been greater still in Asia. In Europe economic conditions ever since the 15th century have incessantly undergone change after change, so that society in the Western world has perforce remained relatively flexible. But in the East it was not so. There economic forces were for centuries in a position of balance. Population did not grow, for the potential increase was regularly swept away by war, pestilence, and famine. Wealth did not grow, because the surplus was seldom used but for the adornment of palaces and the filling of kings' treasuries. Knowledge did not grow, for Eastern philosophies were incurious of the world of experience, and devoted to the analysis of what

may lie behind and beyond. Social forms thus became obstinately fixed, and custom remained the great rule of life. These medieval conditions persisted over the greater part of Asia until the close of the 19th century.

In India the forces of stability were exceptionally strong, for social groups had been crystallized into castes ; and so society, solidified by economic equilibrium, became in itself a peculiar obstacle to change. But here also forces from without were perhaps stronger than anywhere else in Asia. English political predominance, established in 1818, had in the succeeding forty years brought with it new and powerful influences, moral and economic. The ancient knowledge had been attacked in the new schools ; the old economic system had been undermined by the new administration. In the latter part of that period these forces had been applied with considerable activity ; and had provoked that wide-spread uneasiness which found its principal expression in the Mutiny.

But at that time the forces of change had made little progress. They had been enough to alarm, but not enough to influence. Outside the English centres of administration, the old ideas prevailed. A village head-man in a newly-occupied district could still prove his zeal by sending in to the Commissioner before breakfast the heads of the dakoits whom he had caught the day before. Hill-peoples signalized the temporary collapse of British authority by a resolute attempt to stamp out from their midst the whole brood of wizards. Khonds still secured the fertility of their fields by the annual

human victim, bought with a price. Caste Hindus could not cross the seas without almost inexpiable pollution. Government was still personal. It still rested on military force, just triumphantly vindicated ; and the India thus held by the sword was the old India, utterly indifferent to politics, careless of what might happen elsewhere, ready to obey and assist any government that could maintain itself, and accepting the bloody retribution that followed the Mutiny as according with the practice of great kings.

Since that time the forces of change have played unceasingly upon India, with far-reaching consequences, political, moral and economic. They are still very incomplete—possibly they may never be completed. When you are dealing with a great mass of people—at the time of the Mutiny India contained probably 250 million—changes seldom are pervasive. Every country exhibits a wide difference between the ideas and the standards of its highest and its lowest classes ; and the greater the area and the larger the population, the greater is the likelihood of such divergencies. The culture of ancient India never penetrated all the strata of society ; nor does the culture and thought of modern India. The essential fact seems to be that between 1858 and 1918 external influences affected a sufficient proportion of the population to make a marked, almost a revolutionary difference.

The strongest influence has been economic. The old balance of forces has been destroyed. Since the Mutiny the population of India has increased approximately by a third. It is crowded together,



even in rural districts, in densities which in Europe would connote large cities and vigorous industries ; but in India agriculture is the normal correlative of dense population. Its growth has compelled resort to poorer and poorer lands. We cannot follow the process everywhere, for lack of early statistics ; but in Madras the cultivated area has more than trebled since 1853. The average modern cultivator has then to work harder than his grandfather was accustomed to do, save in the few regions where the tendency has been off-set by extended irrigation.

Alongside of this, and as a direct consequence, has gone a considerable agrarian displacement. As land increased in value, and the steady operation of the law-courts facilitated the recovery of debt, both real and fictitious, many enterprising persons lent money on land and subsequently foreclosed ; and besides this the rising middle-class of the larger cities steadily bought land wherever they could. These processes, familiar to the student of economic history in Europe as well as in India, have tended in spite of legislation to replace the small cultivator with possessory rights by the small cultivator with no rights at all.

Then, too, new methods of earning a living have appeared. The professions—the law, medicine, education, journalism—have arisen. They existed indeed before the Mutiny, but since then they have developed with extraordinary rapidity. So also has the demand for clerical labour, which is surrounding the Indian cities, as it has surrounded London, with mean suburbs. In short, a middle-

class, both higher and lower, with an economic rather than a hereditary basis, has established itself in India, though the individual members are still cut off from marriage outside their particular castes.

Alongside of this new class we find a nascent industrialism. Just as the professional class has sprung up to replace a group of Europeans who in 1858 still enjoyed a practical monopoly of medical, legal, and journalistic functions in India, so too the industrialists have followed the example of the Europeans who introduced modern large-scale production into their country. But this development has been much slower than that of the professional class, in part owing to a lack of capital, in part to the rigid free-trade policy followed by Government. A protective system would undoubtedly have facilitated the speedier development of such a class ; and on the whole English policy has evidently favoured the professions much more than industry. But though Indians very generally regard this as proving the subordination of Indian to British interests, it should be remembered that an early adoption of protective measures would have favoured, not so much Indian industrial enterprise as foreign capital which would have established itself in the country.

As things were, only two large centres of factory-production were developed—one the cotton factories of Bombay, the other the jute mills of Bengal. Round them, and the other lesser examples of modern industry in India, has gradually formed the nucleus of a class of industrial workers. For a long



time these men were scarcely differentiated from the agricultural population. Most of them as members of joint families had an interest in the land, and for a long time many of them paid an annual visit of some duration to their native villages, in order to take part in the harvest. However this practice gradually died out ; and a class of proletariat labour is visibly forming round the class of Indian industrialists.

Lastly, Indian trade has not only expanded at an almost incredible speed, but it has passed under the control of world-wide influences. The price of wheat or jute or cotton is no longer determined by Indian conditions ; since 1858 the power of external influences on the course of trade has multiplied a hundred-fold ; and the Indian markets are to-day directly affected by a hurricane in the United States or a bumper crop in the Argentine. This extends even to currency and the general level of prices. One of the main elements in the rise of prices which began in India in the first years of the 20th century was the general rise in prices in Europe ; so that the same train of events curtailed the luxuries and straitened the existence of a clerk in London and a clerk in Calcutta.

In all these ways subtle penetrating forces have operated, with an ever growing power, to destroy that economic independence and rigid condition of Indian society which had continued for perhaps twenty centuries.

Like results may be traced in the moral as in the economic world. Western education had been introduced long before the Mutiny ; and the

decision to establish Indian universities had been taken in 1854. But the universities themselves were only established in 1857, and the policy of constantly expanding the scope of educational activities really dates from that year. As in the economic world, so also in the moral, the effects at first were scarcely perceptible. But as money and energy were more and more largely applied, the educational movement rolled on in geometrical progression until it became self-actuated and assumed the character of a popular movement. In Bengal alone there are as many university students as there are in England. As the Calcutta University Commission justly observed, nothing comparable has been seen since the Middle Ages.

In its moral aspects this development offers many similarities to our own Renaissance. Western science has exercised much the same solvent effect on Indian tradition as Greek thought did on the medieval world. It has provoked the spirit of enquiry and criticism ; it has awakened intellectual curiosity ; it has created vernacular literatures. So that a group of influences, which on one side attacked the social and political structure by altering economic conditions, on another attacked the mental acquiescence on which that structure depended by altering the mental outlook, just as in Europe the influx of precious metals reinforced the intellectual movement of the Renaissance.

The common tendency of the economic and moral influences working in India in the last two generations has been principally manifested in the political changes with which the following pages

are directly concerned. The new forces affected both the policy of Government and the attitude of the people.

The policy of Government reflects these changes in many ways. The development of transport and communication intimately modified its operation, bringing the whole Indian organism within reach of orders from London, subordinating the provincial Governments more closely to the Government of India, and the district officials to the local Governments. Nor was this limited to the scope of formal orders. Political influences radiating from London penetrated much more rapidly and effectually into official circles. The telegraph carried the news of India to England while still fresh and warm ; and the same instrument could carry back within effective time not only orders or advice based on the last development of circumstances, but the public criticism of the Houses of Parliament and of the English press.

The same ease of movement and communication of news aided to conceal if not to change the essential basis of Government. In 1857 evidence of its military power was everywhere apparent. But since then the troops which formerly were scattered over the whole face of the country have been concentrated in great cantonments, and normally soldiers are seldom seen. Increased rapidity of fire, from artillery as well as small arms, has diminished the relative powers of a disorderly mob. The invention of wireless has established a method of communication which cannot easily be inter-

rupted ; and the aeroplane has robbed ancient fastnesses of their security.

But while governments have thus become stronger against attempted rebellion, they have also become more liable to external attack. This has been peculiarly the case with India. Time had been when the gradual desiccation of Central Asia had driven great masses of men west and south, towards Europe and into India. But such days had closed. The scanty population of those decaying regions had centuries since ceased to constitute a political danger. The forces producing these countless invasions which had brought and established in India the Aryan speech and the Mohammedan religion had long spent themselves. But a new threat emerged in full force in the second half of the 19th century. The desert might be bridged by the railway ; and before the period closed Russia had assembled at the rail-heads of Russian Turkestan material to continue her lines to the very frontiers of India ; and Germany had planned a road that was to have led direct from Berlin to the Persian Gulf. Politically as well as morally and commercially India had fallen within the constricting influences of the present age.

It could not be expected that the classes of Indians affected by the new moral and intellectual influences should fail to respond to the political tendencies as well. Furthermore, their response was likely to differ from that of Government and involve considerable political dislocation.

Western studies brought the political ideas of the West ; the railway, the telegraph, the news-

paper spread them broadcast. The teachings of Burke and Rousseau, of Mill and Mazzini, found a new and appreciative audience, which contrasted the despotic form of Government maintained by the English in India with the evident democratic tendencies of Western political theory and practice.

One result was the adoption of democratic theory as the basis of what the Indian Government ought to be. Another was the development of nationalist ideas. In Europe these had grown up on a foundation of common speech, common religion, and belief in a common race. These were not present in the vigorous form in which they occurred in Europe. For one thing the Indian area was vastly larger than that of any European country except Russia, and so the unifying forces were slow and diffused in operation. Each province had its own group of languages, quite distinct from the others ; Hinduism is too various and indefinite a faith to offer a good rallying point ; and India was visibly partitioned out among too many races, and the separate racial spirit too strongly conserved by the institution of caste, for a feeling of racial unity to develop spontaneously. But these disadvantages were counteracted by the new influences. English served as a common speech ; transport development familiarized the middle classes of the several provinces with one another ; newspapers acquainted them with common needs and common desires ; and finally a sense of nationality emerged, not from a common identity which indeed was lacking, but from the common contrast which all the Indian races displayed in relation to their foreign rulers.



In India as in Italy, a sense of unity developed under the pressure of foreign dominion.

The ideas of democracy and nationality long remained confined to the educated classes. But gradually the causes which had facilitated their birth facilitated their extension. Nationalist propaganda could be and gradually was disseminated among the people at large.

Up to a certain point these changes did not involve any political conflict. The English despots in India were democrats at home. But while the Indian Nationalists were formulating their views on the development of the Indian Government, the governors of India still had not formulated even to themselves the political line that should be taken. Everyone agreed that the foreign administration of India could not go on for ever. Everyone agreed that the English were acting as trustees until Indians should be capable of protecting their own rights. But no one had thought out the consequences of this position or could indicate a line of progress. The main concern of Government was how to provide India with the best administration compatible with the exigencies of finance. This involved the employment of a larger and larger European element.

Thus under a common pressure of modern political ideas, Government and the educated Indians reached mutually destructive conclusions. The one sought good government, the other self-government. Hence the emergence, in the late part of the period, of a struggle between the educated classes naturally desirous of power and the bureau-

cracy naturally anxious to preserve their excellent and elaborated system of administration.

In England itself sympathy was much divided. Englishmen were proud, and rightly proud, of their work in India ; but their whole political life and history was founded on the practice of self-government, and they had always viewed with favour the efforts of other peoples to follow in their own footsteps. The question, as they reckoned it, was to what extent could the bureaucratic Government be modified in a popular direction without endangering the work already accomplished.

On the whole the decision favoured popular advance, though not so far or so fast as Indians demanded ; and this situation towards the close of the period added groups of political extremists, followed mostly by the very young, and seeking to obtain by violence what had been refused to argument, to those elements of the Indian population which had always been hostile to foreign rule.

Finally the war of 1914 brought this political development to a definite stage in its progress, marked by the announcement of 1917 and the Report of 1918. Just a century after the establishment of British predominance in India, the goal of British rule was defined and a path to it projected. The event gives completeness to the period which preceded and led up to it. Until 1918 none knew certainly whither the progress evidently made since the Mutiny had been tending ; and whatever the fate of the Reforms, whatever becomes of the principle of dyarchy, the year will continue to serve as a great historical landmark, such as cannot

elsewhere be found since the Mutiny. It definitely marks the end of the period in which India was held by the sword.

It seems to me that three considerable errors may be traced in the British policy as a whole. For one thing there was a growing tendency for the Home Government to interfere more than had been the custom in past days. It had normally been content with laying down the general principles of policy and beyond that merely exercising a veto on the conduct of the Government in India ; but after the Mutiny the broad tendency was for more and more of the administration to be conducted from London. The activity of the Secretary of State gradually became more detailed. In part this sprang from accidents of individual character. Some men are more self-assertive than others ; and towards the close of the period office fell into the hands of one or two who were peculiarly self-assertive, and whose example, one may suppose, affected the conduct of successors naturally less domineering. But in the main this tendency was the fruit of circumstances—of the Red Sea Cable ; and so far the fault can be laid at no one's door. Similar events were strengthening the hold and increasing the influence of the Government of India on the provincial Governments, and of these on their subordinate officials. In short the conditions under which the whole government was carried on strongly promoted the growth of centralization in every branch of the Indian polity. In some conditions this is not necessarily bad. But when it is applied to a sub-continent like India, where



the people of Tinnivelly differ as much from those of Peshawur as the Spaniard does from the Swede, the uniformity which centralization presupposes is a manifest evil ; and this evil is incalculably exaggerated when the central point of control lies on the other side of the world—as if Western Europe were administered from Tokio.

In the second place it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that efficiency in administration actually was over-valued by the Indian Government. It was natural and admirable for the very able men who formed that Government to hate disorder and anomalies and mistakes and to do their utmost to root them out. But when they decided time after time to do so by introducing new European elements into the administration, they were taking the easy road. Cromer's principle—of only employing a European where he could not get the work done by Egyptians in any sort of way—was a sounder and safer method. But here again the fault was no man's. It was due to the greater and ever greater influence which European ideas of administration were coming to exercise upon the Government, and which precluded the old simpler methods by which Cubbon was enabled to manage Mysore for forty years with only half a dozen Europeans under him. So far, of course, as the later policy increased efficiency, it was a gain, because bad administration is necessarily an evil. But when it came to be used as an argument for employing Europeans instead of Indians, and for reserving the higher services as far as possible for Europeans while their numbers steadily grew, the matter evi-

cently became charged with a racial quality of a dangerously explosive kind. In this way Government suffered from the defects of its qualities.

In the third place, when we look back on the years that have elapsed, it is easy to discern that many difficulties might have been avoided had Government defined its purpose in India and devised a definite scheme by which that purpose was to be achieved. Instead of that we see experiments made in one direction by Canning, in another by Lytton, in a third by Ripon, in a fourth by Minto. There was no sequence or continuity in our efforts to introduce political reforms ; and consequently they lost much of their effect. But when we consider history as a whole, we must admit that such is the usual course of affairs. Foresight is perhaps the rarest of gifts ; and a succession of men who will strive in the same definite direction, and who must therefore view the changing current of affairs with unchanging eyes, can be secured only by a miracle. Here again the fault lies mainly in the general defects of human nature and the circumstances in which we live ; and it is easier to note it and trace its consequences as we look back, than to say at what precise time and in what precise manner it should have been avoided.

In pursuing this story of mixed gain and loss, of good and ill, I shall seek to show the effects of these modern influences firstly on the executive Government and its administrative policy, then on the foreign policy of the Government of India, and lastly on the political development of the people and its reaction on the structure of the Government.